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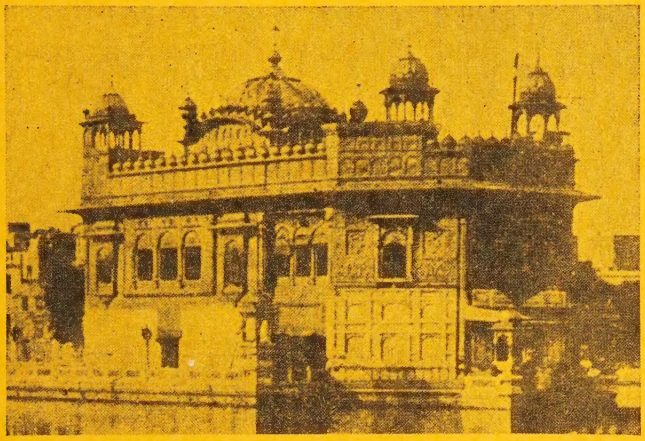
The Message of the Sikh Faith



GOLDEN TEMPLE, AMRITSAR, PUNJAB, INDIA

Where Hari Kirtan (Divine Music) is sung every day from 2:00 A. M. to 11:30 P. M., the Temple being open to all, without distinction of caste, creed or color.

Written by

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GURU-NANAK SERIES

The Message of the Sikh Faith

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Religion and Religious Life
As Conceived by
Guru-Nanak

Published by Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan (Free Divine Communion) Society, 1930-36 S. Grant St.,
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GURU NANAK

With his two constant companions, Bala and Mardana

Preface

The Guru Nanak series of pamphlets is being published by the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan (Free Divine Communion) Society, 1930-36 S. Grant St., Stockton, Calif., in order to expound to the western world the Ideal of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, who taught that:

1. All mankind are one kin, as they spring from the same Divine source, the difference of race, creed, caste or color, being due to various stages of evolution, climate, and other social and physical surroundings.

2. That God has been sending His prophets and saints and Bhagats in all ages, and in all climes, in order to guide humanity in their onward march, and that no one of them had the exclusive right to Divine truth.

3. That the more evolved the human race, the more advanced the teacher it gets, and the highest evolution of a prophet is reached where, with the full force of truth and Divine light welling out of him at all pores, he can still keep his balance, and does not

begin making any special claims, for himself, as truth in itself is self-sufficient to draw the seekers to itself.

4. That all human beings have in their holy of holies a spark of the Divine; all that is needed is to remove the cloud of selfishness and allow this Divine light to shine in its full power and glory.

5. That God is above all physical attributes and limitations. He is one and indivisible. He is the source of all truth, and all created things. He is above all fear, and above all thought of vengeance. He is the Timeless Being, free from all birth and rebirth.

He can be realized by every individual who follows the path of true Divine research as laid out by the Satguru (Divine Will manifested in a person who has wholly overcome his egoism and humbly laid himself at the feet of the Lord). Meditate on His name Who is true from the beginning of all time, Who has been true through all ages, Who is true now, and who shall be true for all time to come.—Prof. Teja Singh, M.A., L.L.B., Punjab, India; A.M. Harvard.

Introduction

The paper, "Regilion and Religious Life," as conceived by Guru Nanak, was read by Prof. Jodh Singh, M. A., Professor of Divinity, Khalsa College, Amritsar, Punjab, India, at a religious convention which holds its yearly sitting at one of the various centers of public thought and social uplift in India.

This organization is one of the many activities which are welding the various communities of India into one homogeneous whole; and thus fulfilling the Ideal of Guru Nanak himself.

The paper brings out clearly that religion, like all search after truth, is a scientific pursuit and not a matter of ritual, or lip faith in any Saviour.

The basic principle of Guri Nanak's message that God can be realized from within, and the steps to achieve that realization, are expounded and explained as far as the limitations of time which a paper read at a convention has to submit itself to, would allow the learned author.

Of these four—Sewa (unselfish devotion to the service of mankind) is both the beginning and the

final aim of Sikh faith. By service the human soul daily frees itself of the dross of egoism, and becomes slowly and steadily capable of being deeply touched by association with the wise, and moved to the heights of emotional and devotional tenderness by the recitation and singing of Divine verse (Bani, and Hari Kirtan).

These three initial steps sufficiently uplift the human mind and make it capable of receiving and meditating upon the Divine Gurmantra (the Divine Name—the highest symbol for the source of all Love, Truth and Goodness).

The word of power and Divine initiation given by the Sikh Gurus is Wahguru, Wahguru, Wahguru, and there are four stages through which the disciple has to pass before he covers the field of direct God Consciousness.

Before these steps are explained it is essential to give here the reasons for which the Sikh Gurus chose Wahguru as the Gurmantra (the Word of Divine power) for Kaljuga (the Iron Age.)

To the Sikh Gurus the various names for God signify the same thing, but the popular minds in all

countries have so far associated them with some physical ideal of power, glory, and greatness.

It was for this reason that to the inner soul of Guru Nanak the sacred word Wahguru was revealed, as the highest symbol for the Source of all Love, Truth and Goodness, and just as the Divine Father is above all formal associations, the word Wahguru is also above them.

Further, this word combines in it the concentrated Divine energy of the sacred words of the four Yugas (Cycles), as it sums them all up in itself.

Above all, the Gurmantra Wahguru is rhythmic and natural, and the most suitable Divine name for the purpose of meditation in Kaljuga (the Iron Age), when mankind is passing through a keen struggle for existence, and requires a spiritual weapon which it can use every minute without retiring to jungles or monasteries.

The four stages of making Wahguru a part and parcel of our very being, and living in the Divine atmosphere every moment, are based on the most psychological and natural grounds, and lead the disciple from step to step till he wholly clears the

fog of selfishness, and is at one with the Divine Law.

The disciple following this path of direct Divine research has always to go to bed early, unless some important social service or helpful charity makes a call upon his time. Getting up at four in the morning, he has to take his bath, and after reciting some verses in the praise of the Divine Father, sit calmly in his study or meditation room and repeat the Gurmantra Wahguru in a steady low tone.

The sceond stage of this Meditation is to repeat Wahguru, Wahguru, Wahguru, with the tip of the tongue without moving the lips.

From this step the disciple can pass into the third stage of rhythmic breathing. Carry the syllable Wah with each inhalation, and bring down the syllable Guru with each exhalation.

However, the most vital part in all this Meditation on the name is that the wandering mind which is led away by thoughts of anger, lust and other selfish desires, must be brought back again and again on Wahguru by means of fervent prayer and earnest endeavor. The struggle sometimes will be very acute, and very often the disciple will be discouraged

by the revelation of hidden springs of evil gushing out of covered-up nooks within his mind.

But he should bear in mind that the very first object of Meditation on the name is to wash out the hidden dirt of sin; and the more it comes on the surface and is thrown out, the more the disciple should be thankful.

Thus, phychologically, this Meditation acts as a revealer of our weaknesses, and the means of washing them out; and the more the mind remains in the Divine waters of the Name the purer and purer it gets, till the dross of selfishness is wholly washed out, and there is nothing to come between the Divine within and the Divine without. Thus the Divine ray of the human soul blends itself with the Infinite, and being at one with the Divine Law, works for the uplift of humanity without any distinction of caste, creed, race, or color.

The attainment of this frame of mind is the final goal of Sikhism, and to a true Sikh no dreams of heaven or paradise (or delusions of occult power) can be acceptable until his own soul has risen above all selfishness and is ever willing to serve mankind and do the Father's will.

But before this stage can be attained, and the name Wahguru become a part and parcel of our very being, the disciple has to go on meditating from day to day with all love, fervour, and good will; and in God's own way he will reach the fourth and final stage of meditation when——though still living in the world, and doing all its duties—his mind will be always with the Divine Father, and his actions will reflect infinite Peace, Love, and Mercy.—Teja Singh.

Religion and Life as Conceived by Guru Nanak

It has been said, and truly said, that it is only when we begin to forget about religions that we begin to discern true religion. Science has taught us that in the realm of physical activities there is but one law for all men; how can then the case be otherwise in the realm of the spirit? It is a pity that people who profess to be the custodians of the highest knowledge yet revealed to mankind do not as a rule show the same toleration towards one another as do men of science, or else long ere now we would have arrived at some satisfactory solution of the prominent problems that are agitating the whole world of religious thought. "So long as different religions stand aloof, each will continue to ascribe to the other the vices of its most unworthy representatives, but when they meet and learn to know one another they find a great common standing ground. Judging each by its best, each can have for the other only respect and goodwill." From this point of view I regard this convention of religions as a great blessing, both for the natives of this country and for

mankind in general, and pray to Akal Purkh (The Timeless One) to grant it a long and useful career.

Could there be different religions for different men? We can imagine people in different stages of spiritual development, but the laws governing spiritual life must be the same for all, or else a conception of religion itself would become impossible. In practice, religion implies a common course of conduct for all its votaries. Now, how can that be possible if the laws governing my life are different from those governing your life and the laws governing the lives of both of us again different from the laws governing the life of a third brother? If spiritual laws are not fixed, then the teachings of prophets, masters and Gurus are in vain, for what are those teachings if not the melodious outpourings of the spiritual experiences of the teachers themselves enunciating certain laws and recommending certain acts which, when we practice them, we shall find true in our case also? Guru Nanak beautifully portrays this truth in a slok in Asa di War (a verse paragraph in the morning hymnal song of the Sikhs). At the time that he flourished it was not uncommon for men to think that by a Divine command men were divided into four classes, called varunas (castes), and

that every one of them would find supreme bliss by following the path of his own division. "The path of a Yogi (religious devotee) was that of searching after Divine wisdom, the duty of a Brahamana to read Vedas, the path of a Kshatrya (warrior class) was that of fearless devotion to arms, and the duty of a Sudra to serve others." This was the common belief before Guru Nanak, who taught: The path for all is one, only if we understand the secret." And what is that secret? The Guru himself proceeds to explain:

"One God is the source of all Divine life. From that God is the soul. If one understands the secret of the Divine spark within, one becomes a radiant source of Divine light. Nanak is the humble instrument and servant of that fount of Truth, Love, and Justice."

If God is one and all souls are from Him and of the same nature, how could the way to realize Him be different for different souls.

But this leads us to the most important question —"What is religion?" for it is on the satisfactory solution of this fundamental question that all our doubts on minor points are to be resolved. If it meant certain rituals, sacraments and ceremonies,

men could go on, each according to his own choice, keeping themselves engaged in different forms without ever discovering their error and finding the true path common to all. Does it consist in precepts and dogmas, doctrines and theories? Does it mean a belief in some historic event, or a belief in something supernatural that passeth all human understanding or experience? Does it require us to follow the laws and regulations revealed to some person in the past in a supernatural way, the truth of which is proved not by experiences of our own souls, but by the miracles which the same person wrought? I shall take all these questions seriatim and try to explain what Guru Nanak and his successors understood by religion and religious life.

Every religious system has been observed to begin by denouncing some forms and to end by establishing some others. The reason is not far to seek. "While the meaning is alive in them, they are not only harmless, but pregnant and life-giving. When we come to think that they possess in themselves material and magical virtues, then the purpose which they answer is to hide God from us and make us practically into atheists." I use the word form in its widest acceptation. It is not merely outward garbs

and visible marks that are included in the terms; it is intended to include all those actions, of whatever spiritual importance they may be, that are done mechanically. Prayer is a form, when our mouths are uttering the words, but our soul is not responding to them. Charity practised for vanity and show is a form. And the question is, is it in the performance of certain rituals and ceremonies in a formal way that religion consists? Although in practice most of us may adhere to forms, yet our intellect cannot accept this definition of religion in this twentieth century. Says the Guru:

"The research after the Divine (religion) consisteth not in a patched coat, or in a mendicant's staff, or in ashes smeared over the body.

"Religion consisteth not in earrings worn, or a tonsured head, or in the blowing of horns.

"Train thy mind to be above the temptations of the world, though still living in the thickest of the fray, and thou shalt find the key to direct Divine knowledge."

Empty forms, rituals and ceremonials as such, therefore, are not religion.

Does religion mean, then, a belief in certain doctrines, an intellectual conception of certain truths and

an atempt to live one's life according to certain precepts, expecting the supreme bliss as a reward for all these after death? This view is held by the majority of men. They think that for all their beliefs, conceptions and good actions they will get credit entries in the Book of Reckoning, and for all their unbeliefs and bad actions, debit entries. A balance will be struck after death immediately or on some fixed day of judgment, and their souls will pass on to heaven or hell according as the balance is in their favor or against them. Heaven and hell are conceived to be places where they will be taken by angels or devils as the case may be. Now, it is difficult to see things in this life which are to happen after death. To be sure that this view of religion is true, one must believe that the man who taught these things was aware of all this in a supernatural way, was the special messenger of God, and to prove this last assertion he could work miracles which ordinary mortals could not.

Methinks, atheists have not done so much harm to the cause of religion as in some cases the preachers of religion themselves. The bigotry of one sect towards another, the different ways of explaining the same phenomenon, according as it is observed in one's

own religion or in that of his adversary, requiring dogmatic submission to statements which can be proved neither by reason nor experience, all these and many more causes like these, have combined to disgust men with religion. Religion is not presented as consisting of facts, the truth of which men could see even now, but as consisting of dogmas which are beyond human ken, of precepts which men must obey without questioning their worth. It is altogether an affair of another world, a practice that will save you after death. With so many elements of doubt in a proposition, it was but natural for men to reject it. In the last century men of science criticized religion most unsparingly, and that criticism has produced a very good result. It has separated chaff from the real grain, and has made men, who profess different religions, think systematically. In consequence of it men are beginning to realize "that we cannot draw any partition line through the phenomena of religious life and affirm that on one side lie the generalizations of earthly reason and on the other the declarations of heavenly truth. The utterances in which the heart of man has embodied its glimpses of the higher vision are not of equal merit, but they must be explained in the same way."

I say, instead of being dogmatic, religion is also developing into a science, and all the great religious teachers of the world are being looked upon as members of the same brotherhood, not necessarily saying things that are of equal merit, but still pointing to the same road.

This, however, was by the way. The second view of religion is untenable in many ways. First of all, a man has no means of knowing directly whether the life that he is leading will surely take him to bliss after death. The whole of his religion he has to accept on hearsay. The miracles that certified to the correctness of those teachings he cannot witness now. So he has to believe in history and the observations of men dead long ago. The most serious objection to this sort of religion lies in supposing a break in man's spiritual development. After death one will be suddenly taken to the abode of bliss, of which he knows nothing, while living. This idea of religion, therefore, will not do.

What is religion, then? It consists in an attempt after direct God consciousness. "Thou, O man, hast got the invaluable blessing of a human birth," says Guru Nanak.

"This is thy chance to realize God directly, and be at one with Him."

God is not an unknown element, according to the Sikh scriptures. In realizing the Divine spark within each human soul, we make ourselves capable of realizing the universal Divine in its infinite harmony, beauty and love, and see the working of His Spirit in all created things. In Him we love, move and have our being. God consciousness does not mean, therefore, the soul coming in contact with something external to its own being, but rather the soul diving deep into its own being to realize Fundamental Reality, of which it is conscious already, though dimly. "He that pervades the universe, also dwells in the body. He who seeketh shall find Him."

There are forms in Sikh religion, and there are precepts, too, but no bliss is promised to the soul that has not realized God. Forms and precepts are simply means to an end. Says the Guru:

"They who continue to perform ceremonial works but are egoistic, bear a crushing load. When there is no love for the Name (Divine Word) such works are sinful."

Again:—

"Even though a man be versed in the six Systems

of Hindu Philosophy, and practise puraka, kumbhaka, and rechaka (inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath); even though he be intellectually illumined, practise meditation and perform ablutions at places of pilgrimage;

"Only eat food cooked by himself, touch no money, and live in a forest;

"Yet if he feel no love for God's name in his heart; whatever he has done shall be ephemeral.

"Far above him in direct God consciousness is a man, who though lowest of the low in the social scale, bears in his heart a sincere Love for the Divine Father and feels the pulsations of His Spirit through all created things."

Forms and precepts are, as it were, directions to the novice who is going to perform the grand experiment of God-vision in his soul. If the experiment succeeds, forms and precepts have gained their object, else they are mere hide-bound directions and constitute no spiritual merit in themselves. Sikhism also insists upon faith in the Guru, but not for a thing that was to happen after death, but a thing the realization of which is possible in this earthly life.

But this conception of religion may appear very peculiar to some of us, especially to those who are im-

bued with Western ideas. For them religion consists in daring and doing something positively good, in actively checking evil tendencies and not in the realization of visions. To them I may say that Sikhism, too, holds the incessant daring and doing of good as the highest mark of a God conscious person.

He, according to Bhai Gurdas, the first Sikh divine, "works for the upward march of human evolution like a hod-man who has sold his body and soul for that purpose. He is not daunted by hunger or want of sleep, and thinks eating and taking rest as only means to an end."

But the flesh will not leave its desires nor will the body work for other's good, until a change has been wrought in the inner soul. Human mind is too weak to cope successfully with the demon of selfishness, and the body is too frail to take up this task of infinite difficulty and trial.

The case, however, at once becomes otherwise when the Divine spark within the human soul has been quickened and awakened to the full sense of its power and responsibility. Then, there is no room for the powers of darkness in the Sanctuary of the Lord, and nothing so stupendous in magnitude that God

conscious man cannot put his hands to. Says the Guru:—

"I was struck with infinite awe and wonder when I entered the region of direct God consciousness. The Divine Spirit ebbed through and controlled my hands, and my arms. All lower activities ceased to exist, and all fear of punishment passed away. The Infinite Love Divine embraced me all around, and controlled my activities. I saw the Divine Seed sprouting within my soul. Filth, attachment and sin flew away. The bright day dawned. Upon the beloved of His heart He looked with grace and loving favour." Sayeth Nanak: "I became pure when I found the Eternal Lord. The ray hath united with the Sun, water hath mingled with water. Night hath blended with night; I have become perfect. My eyes see Brahm, my ears hear Brahm (the Universal Soul Divine). I talk of One and One alone. All this is the manifestation of the Spirit. I recognize none else as the doer except the Lord. He Himself is the doer, He Himself is the partaker of all fruit, sayeth Nanak; those alone know this who have drunk the Nectar of Hari."

Comparisons are odious, and I shall not indulge in them. But since the organizers of this convention

have expressly asked every speaker to set forth the peculiar and distinguishing features of his faith, I cannot conclude my thesis without making a few observations calculated to throw light upon the peculiarities of the faith of Guru Nanak. To a certain extent, I cannot deny this ideal of religion was held by certain Rishis (religious devotees) who preceded Gurus, and, speaking in a general sense, all religious systems have been taking mankind towards this ideal. But I think I shall not be far wrong in saying that to Guru Nanak and his successors alone belongs the credit of discovering and systematizing a comparatively more perfect and more beautiful way of realizing this ideal.

Instead of retiring to jungles and making the body devoid of all its energies, they have chalked out a path that will lead us to our Beloved amidst the din and turmoil of our mundane activity. They agree with their forerunners in the analysis of the situation. Egoistic desires constitute the veil. How to rend that veil. The forerunners of Guru Nanak were practically all led to more or less bodily inactivity and retirement from the world in order to accomplish this end. Here and there one comes across the ideal of "Nishkama Karm" (unselfish devotion to

duty for duty's sake). Yet generally desire was understood to be the basis of all activity. The very ideals of heavens, and hells, or those of paradise, Swarga and Nark were based upon this motive force of desire. Love as the basis of action was not felt so deeply and preached so generally.

This great truth dawned upon the Gurus, and as a preparatory step, instead of the renunciation of all activity, they enjoined the renunciation of selfish motives and engaging in Sewa, i. e., works of love. Says the Guru:

"Of all renunciations the best is to renounce lust, anger and covetousness."

Before one can become fit for God-vision, he is to renounce all egoism.

"Why goest thou searching for God in the jungles? Search thy own heart. God dwelleth with thee; why wanderest thou from forest to forest?

"Remove from thy soul the terrible and crushing load of selfishness and egoism; by associating and communing with God conscious persons, so shalt thou find rest, abide in peace, and be blest with direct Divine realization (God-vision)."

Again:—

"When the body was relieved of its load of egoism, when I began to Love the command of my Lord, when my mind delighted in whatever He did to me, then it was that I saw the Wonder with my own eyes. Now I have understood that my misery is over. My desire has been quenched. My egoism is no more; the Perfect Guru has been successful in instructing me."

Need I mention that the disciple engaged in Sewa (unselfish service) does away with all moral vices in doing away with egoism?

After Sewa, Satsang (associating with the wise) is the next step. I need not dwell upon it. The value of good company is known to everybody. Recitation of the Word (Bani) and Hari Kirtan (singing hymns in the praise of the Hari, the source of all Truth, Love, and Good comes next.

"Music," says Luther, "is the art of the Prophets, the only art that can calm the agitation of the soul." "Music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is a bitter enemy, for it removes from the heart the weight of sorrow and the fascination of evil thought." "Music is the child of

prayer, the companion." "Music washes away from the soul the dust of every-day life." "And," says Carlyle, "the meaning of song goes deep; who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for a moment gaze into it."

All religions have recognized the charm of music, but none of them has gone so far as the Sikh religion. The whole of our scriptures are written in musical measures, and every line of them can be set to music. In our sacred Temple at Amritsar from 2:00 a. m. to 11:00 p. m. we have nothing but sacred music. The effect of music upon human emotions is most marvelous. Hari Kirtan is our Parana Yam. It concentrates the mind without torturing the body. Then follows the meditation on the Name, which is the last step. Sewa (unselfish devotion to service) gives full scope for the active manifestation of our love. The world is full of misery because it is full of selfishness. Inactivity cannot remedy it. It is loving service alone that will deprive it of its sting and will convert the abode of misery into a home of bliss. Satsang, Bani, and Kirtan (associa-

tion with the God conscious persons, recitation and singing of Divine hymns) appeal to our intellect and our emotions, and provide sustenance for a life of Sewa (service). Thus prepared amidst loving activities, the soul dives deep into meditation on the Name and has in God-vision its final rest. This, gentlemen, is a bare outline of the practical life of a Sikh.

It may be asked what is the guarantee that this view of religion is right? We have not to wait till death for that purpose, nor to rely on miracles. The experience of our own souls proves the view. A sort of calm and joy at once begin to reign in the mind that has taken the first step. Satsang, Bani and Kirtan (communion with saints, recitation and singing of sacred verse) give other experiences which confirm the soul in this path. Before the dawn of the full moon, twilight, showing that the moon must follow, exhibits itself in these stages, and a true Sikh is never devoid of true spiritual experiences of his own, confirming the truth of his Guru's teachings.

"Wahi Guru ji ka Khalsa Sri wahi guru ji ki Fateh."

NOTE:—This is the greeting that a Sikh uses at meeting friends or bidding farewell to them. It

means: "The Khalsa (the Sikh brotherhood) is of God, and all victory and glory is God's."

THE END

SIKH TEMPLE

1930-36 S. Grant Street, Stockton, California, U. S. A.